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Dec. 19, 2000  
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## NEWS RELEASE

### UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE WILL MAKE PERFORMANCE HISTORY IN BELGIUM

DAYTON, Ohio — After winning the first-place gold medal at the American Traditions national vocal competition in Savannah, Ga., in March, tenor and University of Dayton artist-in-residence John Wesley Wright thought he'd hit his ultimate high for 2000. He was wrong.

Wright, who is currently touring Belgium with the Scala children's choir to promote a collaborative compact disc released Nov. 15, said he had to pinch himself to make sure he wasn't dreaming when he learned recently he would meet King Albert and Queen Paola Dec. 21 — immediately after becoming the first American to sing for the royal family during a traditional holiday concert held annually at the Royal Palace in Brussels.

The concert, featuring Wright and the choir, will be filmed live at 3 p.m. Dec. 21 and then aired on four Belgian national television stations on Christmas Eve.

"This is a great, great honor," Wright said. "I'm beside myself with excitement."

Wright said the concert will feature Christmas music and conclude with "Silent Night," featuring one verse each in German, French, Flemish and English to represent the languages spoken in Belgium. "I'll sing the English verse solo, and at the end of the song the king and queen will rise and come over to greet me — me, John Wright," he said, then added with a laugh, "I just pinched myself and yes, it's still me."

The invitation to the palace came during his concert tour with Scala to promote *Christmas Time is Here*, a collection of 16 holiday songs in a variety of American styles including gospel, spiritual and blues, said Wright, who is featured in two solos and seven numbers with the children's choir. Scala, which means "a wide variety" in Dutch, is comprised of about 70 Belgian youths ranging in age from 8 to 18. The group is directed and accompanied by piano-playing brothers Stijn and Steven Kolacny of Aarschot who, after a chance meeting with Wright in Belgium in May, invited him to sing with their choir on the CD and tour.

Wright flew to Belgium in September for a low-budget, three-day recording session in an acoustically ideal old church, then returned to Belgium Nov. 28 — 13 days after the disc was

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released — to learn the recording's success was "far above anything any of us dreamed," he said. "The attention has been incredible. Thanks to the Kolacny brothers' unbelievable efforts, every major and not-so-major Belgian television station, magazine and newspaper has covered this in one way or another."

But Stijn Kolacny attributes much of the disc's success to the American tenor. "That John, as an American, will sing for the Belgian royal family is unique, and the interest of the press here is enormous," he said. "John is giving interviews all the time and he's been followed by television cameras from the day he arrived. Great, isn't it?"

On behalf of the royal family, palace press counselor Pierre-Emmanuel De Bauw said Wright's appearance will be a welcome addition to the holiday concert tradition. "We are very glad that such a high-quality American singer will perform with Scala, and particularly happy that this will give a special international touch to our Christmas concert this year," he said.

Aside from meetings with palace officials to coordinate the concert, Wright and the Kolacnys have been on a tight concert schedule with the choir. Several of the 13 concerts scheduled in December have sold out, he said, and the tour will include four additional performances in early January.

"This whole trip has been amazing, a once-in-a-lifetime event," Wright added. "And singing for a king and queen is a bit like being in a real live fairy tale."

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For media interviews, contact **John Wright** at [jwrightstuff\\_1999@yahoo.com](mailto:jwrightstuff_1999@yahoo.com) and **Stijn Kolacny** at [stijn@kolacny.com](mailto:stijn@kolacny.com). Both men can also be reached by calling 011 32-1-669-9155.